

Service Excellence Awards are booming success

Kayben Farms honoured as Business of the Year

By John Barlow
Okotoks Western Wheel

Close to 400 people packed into the Foothills Centennial Centre in Okotoks on Oct. 21 to show their appreciation for the community's small businesses and their staff. The Okotoks and District Chamber of Commerce held its seventh annual Service Excellence Awards banquet and once again the event exceeded expectations. Awards chairperson Cheryl Actemichuk said attendance at the event increased again this year and the number of nominations increased from 90 last year to 118 this year.

Actemichuk said the feedback from those in attendance was extremely positive. "Everyone said it was even better than last year," she said. "People who have never been to the awards before are blown away when they come. They do not expect it to be as big as it is."

Actemichuk said the biggest thing for the chamber is to promote the event as an opportunity for the small business owners in the community to network with one another and promote their services.

"When I am out there pounding the pavement and speaking to new businesses I tell them this is a great chance to network and meet your neighbours," said Actemichuk. "When you own a business it is hard to find time to meet the people in your community."

She added a lot of people in Okotoks still do not realize the scope of businesses and services available in town and the Service Excellence Awards shine a spotlight on a wide variety of businesses.

However, for Actemichuk, the most rewarding part of the annual Service Excellence Awards is seeing business owners and their staff being rewarded for a job well done.

"It is such an honour for them," said Actemichuk. "It is so worthwhile when someone wins and they really appreciate it."

One of those who appreciated not only winning a Service Excellence Award, but just being nominated was Wendy Shingoose of Image Hair Design.

Shingoose has been in the Okotoks community for more than 30 years and she was ecstatic to win the Service Excellence Award for Personal Care Service last Wednesday evening.

Shingoose was nominated for many of the little things she does as a business owner. Shingoose has had some of her clients for more than 20 years and it is not uncommon for her to give them rides home after they get their hair done or even take her scissors and brush on the road to visit them in the hospital if they need some cheering up.

Going that extra mile is what set her apart, but to Shingoose going above and beyond is simply part of owning a business in a small town.

"I am glad people still recognize that in a small town you can still get small town service," she said.

As for winning the award Shingoose said she was simply shocked.

"I was so honoured," she said. "There were a lot of people nominated in my category and every one deserved to win and they should all be congratulated."

Also winning for the first time was Donna Pavka, owner of Celadonna, for New Business of the Year.

This year the New Business of the Year was a special honour as it was sponsored by Community Futures and included a \$300 prize to help the winning business with promotion.

John Lockhart, director of Community Futures, said he hopes other businesses will follow their lead.

Lockhart said other businesses should step up and sponsor a Service Excellence Award and help take the event to the next level.

As for Pavka, who was a client of Community Futures, she was pleased with her award.

"Honestly, being nominated is a huge honour," she said.

Following are the winners at the seventh annual Service Excellence Awards:

Automotive Service — Jamie Stevenson, Fountain Tire Okotoks

Banking Service — Karas Wright, Scotiabank Okotoks

Building and Construction — Craig Knutson, Covalt Construction Services

Business Service — Richard Suykens, Spy Design

Education — Crystal Exner, St. Mary's School

Grocery Service — David Gilbert, Sobeys

Home Based Business — Anne and Bob Wahlund, Countryside Picture Framing

Hospitality — Barb Binkley, D'Arcy Ranch Golf Club

Media — Jackie Moore, Western Wheel

Municipal/Emergency Service — Shane Olson, Town of Okotoks

Personal Care Service — Wendy Shingoose, Image Hair Design

Professional Service (tie) — Dr. Troy Bourque, Sheep River Veterinary Service, and Gerald Hunt, Padgett Business Services

Recreation/Sport Service — Susan Laurin, Town of Okotoks

Retail Service — Carolyn Beauchamp, Home Hardware

New Business of the Year — Celadonna, Donna Pavka

Business of the Year — Kayben Farms, Claude and Judy Kolk

Unsung Hero Award — Paul Rockley

Volunteer of the Year — Shirley Paradis

Caption: Cheryl Actemichuk and Bev Carlson (middle) present Judy Kolk (left) and Claude Kolk (right) with the Business of the Year award at the seventh annual Okotoks and District Chamber of Commerce Service Excellence Awards at the Foothills Centennial Centre on Oct. 21. Close to 400 people attended the event to celebrate the 118 nominees and 19 award winners.

photo by Bruce Campbell